

## CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

Elders and Messengers

— Churches, &amp;c. — Baptists —

OF THE SEVERAL

## BAPTIST CHURCHES,

Meeting at *Aulcester, Bengeworth, Birmingham, Bourton, Bromsgrove, Bridgnorth, Bewdley, Hooknorton, Leominster, Middleton, Pershore, Sutton, Tewkesbury, Upton, Warwick*, (having also received Letters from *Dudley, Leicester, and Worcester*,) met in ASSOCIATION at *Bourton on the Water*, the 14th and 15th of *August, 1765*, and maintaining the Doctrines of Free Grace, in opposition to Arminianism and Socinianism : and the Necessity of good Works in opposition to Libertinism and real Antinomianism.

the several Churches they represent, with a Fulness of Grace and spiritual Consolation.

Dearly Beloved and longed for in Christ Jesus,

At the close of this our annual Convention, We, with gratitude, reflect upon the Goodness of God towards us ; and can, with Pleasure inform you, that our assembling together has been attended with

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fervent

fervent Cries to the Almighty on your behalf, and We hope, productive of some real Advantage to our own Souls. The Spirit of Prayer has, We trust, in some Degree been poured forth, accompanied with an humble Sense of our Sins and InfirmitieS, our Wants and Necessities, and a thankful Remembrance of the divine Mercies.

Now that the Profits of our Meeting might not be confin'd to, or terminate in ourselves, We would, according to Custom, tender you our cordial and affectionate Advice ; earnestly intreating that it might be received with a Temper of Mind suited to its Nature and Importance, and be productive of Effects, equal to our most ardent Wishes, and sanguine Expectations.

Look well then to the foundation upon which you are built, and seriously and frequently examine your State God-ward : See that you lay Christ at the bottom of your Religion, as the Support of it ; that you place him at the top of it, as its Glory ; and that you make him the Centre of it, to unite all its Parts, and add Beauty and Vigour to the whole : Remember that Growth in Christianity is Growth in the Knowledge of Christ : Seek that Sorrow, that Peace, that Holiness, that Establishment, which flow from Christ : Let all your Duties begin and end in Christ : For (as the great Dr. Owen observes) “ To take up Mercy, Part “ don, and Forgiveness absolutely on the Account “ of Christ, and then to yield all Obedience in the “ Strength of Christ, and for the Love of Christ, is “ the Life of a true Believer.” As Christ is the Sum and Substance of experimental, so he is the Spring and Source of practical Religion ; and the spiritual Improvement of his Blood by Faith, is as necessary for our Sanctification and Comfort, as the shedding of it

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was for our Justification and Acceptance with God.

Take heed lest your Hearts be at any time harden'd thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin. One Corruption favoured and indulged, has sometimes made dreadful Havock even in the gracious Soul. Take Care of Pride, Passion, Censoriousness, Unmercifulness, and especially that inordinate Affection to the Things of this World, which, as it is an Hindrance to Duty, so oftentimes draws a Cloud over the Christian's Evidences, and fixes an indelible Blot upon his Character in the Eyes of carnal Men. A Citizen of Heaven should be a Stranger upon Earth.

Remember that where there is no relative Religion there is no real Religion. Let your Deportment then towards your Children and Servants be grave, and yet pleasant ; your Instructions solemn, and yet plain ; your Prayers with and for them pertinent, and suited to their Case ; and your whole Behaviour amiable and endearing. Moroseness and Severity, even when attended with real Piety, throw a gloomy Aspect upon the Ways of God, and have a discouraging Influence, especially upon young Persons. Bear with us if We add one more Direction under this Head, take Care of stretching out Family Worship to an unreasonable length, or performing it unseasonably : Let it not be deferr'd too late in the Morning, lest your Hearts should be engag'd in the Hurries of Busines, and entangled with the Cares of the World ; nor put it off till the last Thing in the Evening, lest you should be overcome with Drowsiness, and thus yawn out a Prayer, instead of groaning out one.

Endeavour to maintain a reverential Awe of God upon your Minds, and be in his Fear all the Day long ; which Fear is not only consistent with an ardent Love

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to, and steady Dependance upon him, but will be an Antidote against Temptation, a Preventive of Hypocrisy, and give Life, Seriousness and Spirituality to all your religious Duties ; for to serve God in a formal and customary manner, is not to serve, but to mock him. Enter into your Closets, as seeing him that is invisible : Place yourselves in the Assembly, as under his immediate Inspection ; and when called out upon particular Occasions to be a Mouth for others, seek not so much the Applause of Men, as the Testimony of your own Conscience, and the Approbation of God.

Be just and honest in your Dealings : Impose not upon the Ignorance or Credulity of any : Rather suffer by others than let them be Sufferers by you : Injure not your Neighbour in any of his Rights or Possessions : Make his Interest your own, and what you would think it reasonable for him to do, that in a like Case do to him. Nothing has ever brought a greater Reproach upon Christianity, than the tricking and fraudulent Practices of those, who are Professors of it. Attend then our dear Friends to that most excellent Instruction of the Apostle *Paul* ; *Whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise,* *THINK ON THESE Things.*

Be strict in observing the weekly Day of Rest, and not contented with attending upon publick Worship, let it be the Sabbath of the Lord in all your Dwellings : Keep your Children and Servants much under your Eye : Insist upon their remembering something of what they have heard : Put them upon reading the Scriptures ; what is above their Capacities, explain to them, and close the Day with recommending them to God.

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We would rejoice in that Peace and Harmony, which prevails amongst the Churches in general: Do all that you can consistent with Truth and a good Conscience, for the Preservation of it: Sacrifice private and personal Interests for the publick Good: Endeavour after an intimate Acquaintance, and keep up a Christian Correspondence one with another: Walk in Love, bear one anothers Burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ. In a Word, labour like the primitive Christians to be of one Heart and one Soul, and let the Communion of Saints, which is a fundamental Article of your Faith, be a delightful Part of your Experience.

Be intreated frequently to look back to your first setting out in the ways of Religion: Search your Hearts, and pray to God to search them: Be not contented with the Form of Godliness, without the Power; a new Name without a new Nature; titular Sanctity without real Piety; an outward Profession without an holy Conversation: For if like the foolish Virgins you want Oil in your Vessels, when, like them, you seek to enter, the Door will be shut. To conclude, carefully distinguish between the Means and the End: Bless God for a Gospel Ministry, but do not rest in it: Practise Duties, but do not depend upon them: Attend upon Ordinances, but be not satisfied with them: Let Christ be the Glory of your Religion, and then your Religion will be the Glory of Christ.

Need any Motives be added to enforce these Exhortations? Are they not evidently calculated for your own Advantage? By these Things Men live: In all these is the Life of your Spirit, and We are persuaded, that a due Attention to them will contribute to your increasing Comfort, and more extensive Usefulness. To live by Faith on Christ, is the most sweet and delightful: To live to the Glory of God,  
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the most becoming and honourable Life in the World. It is our low, loose, unequal walking in Religion (says one) that makes the Sense of God's Love, Peace with God, and Evidence for eternal Life, so rare a Thing amongst us.

And now may the adorable and ever blessed Jehovah come leaping over the mountains of your Sins and Iniquities, and visit you with his Salvation : May he pour down in an abundant measure his holy Spirit upon you : May he bless you and keep you, lift up the light of his Countenance upon you, and be gracious to you. Under his divine Influence may you stand fast in the Faith, quit you like Men, and be strong. Forgetting the Things that are behind may you press towards them that are before ; and labour that whether present or absent ; living or dying ; in the Flesh or out of it ; prostrate before the Throne of God's Grace here, or standing before the Throne of his Judgment hereafter, you might be accepted of him. Finally, Brethren, Farewel : be perfect, be of good Comfort, be of one Mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you : Thus desire and pray

*Your affectionate Brethren and  
Servants, for Jesus sake.*

Bourton, August 16th, 1765.

Sign'd on Behalf of the whole  
Assembly, by the Moderator

JOHN ASH,

### B R E V I A T E S.

It was desired by one of the Churches that Professors  
should

should be caution'd against such an intermeddling with the Affairs of State as might lead them to speak evil of Dignities and censure those Things which they do not and perhaps cannot understand.

It was also requested by another Church that a Word might be dropp'd against unsettled Notions in Religion, that We might not be carried about with divers and strange Doctrines, but seek after that good Thing, an Heart establish'd by Grace.

It was also moved by one of the Brethren, that Members of Churches might be exhorted to gain some skill in the Art of Singing, in order to join in that delightful part of publick Worship, not leaving it to be chiefly or alone perform'd by the graceless Part of the Assembly.

In all which Requests We heartily concur, and therefore would recommend the Things before mention'd to your serious Consideration.

On Tuesday Evening the Messengers being met, the Letters from the Churches were read, and the Opportunity was both begun and concluded with Prayer.

Wednesday Morning Directions were given for the drawing up of the Circular Letter, and *Brother Beddome* being desir'd to perform that Service, some Time was spent in Prayer.

The same Day the publick Meeting was opened by *Brother Francis*, *Brother Ash* proceeded in Prayer, *Brother M' Gowan* preach'd from *Psalm xlvi.* and 13. Verse, *The King's Daughter is all glorious within;* *her Cloathing is of wrought Gold.* *Brother Caleb Evans* then pray'd, *Brother Turner* preach'd from *Romans*

iv. and 20. Verse, He stagger'd not at the Promise  
of God through Unbelief; but was strong in Faith, giving  
Glory to God. And Brother Jones concluded in Prayer.

In the Evening We had a Sermon upon *Acts xi.*  
22. 23. and 24. Verses, from Brother Wallen of  
London.

The next Morning the Circular Letter was read  
and approv'd, and Brother Beddoes clos'd the Meeting  
in Prayer.

The next Association to be at Hackmorton, to meet  
on Monday Evening in the Whitsun Week. Brother  
Skinner and Brother James Butterworth to preach, in  
Case of Failure of either, Brother Woodman. Call at  
Mr. Whitmore's.

In the last Year were

Baptiz'd 56

Receiv'd by Letter 9

65

Remov'd by Death 31

Dismiss'd to other Churches 7

7

Excluded 4

4

Left the Society 42

42

Total Increase 23

